

# Testimony

The United States Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition  
and Forestry

Rod Hofstedt  
President Elect  
The National CACFP Forum

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**Testimony For  
The United States Senate  
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry**

*Cindy's Mom brings the sleepy two year old to her family child care home early on a workday morning. By about 7:30, Cindy and three other child care children are ready for breakfast. They sit at a table with their child care provider, and she helps them pour milk into their cereal and spread sliced fruit on top. She serves them each a glass of orange juice. This healthy breakfast is how the day begins for over 900,000 children participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program each workday.*

Hello, my name is Rod Hofstedt, I am the President Elect of the National CACFP Forum. I want to thank the Committee for giving me this opportunity to share our views with all of you today. The Forum represents local sponsoring organizations that administer the Child and Adult Care Food Program to family child care providers across the United States. Family child care providers provide child care in their own homes. Based on our experience, and numerous research studies, we believe that the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is one of the key building blocks for good nutrition and quality affordable family child care. The program provides reimbursement for food and meal preparation costs, ongoing training in the nutritional needs of children, and onsite technical assistance through a minimum of three in-home visits each year. CACFP serves 2.7 million children daily: over 900,000 in family child care homes and 1.7 million in child care centers. Today I am going to focus on the family child care portion of CACFP.

**How Do Parents and Children Benefit?**

**Parents and Children benefit because CACFP helps to start good nutrition habits early.** Nutrition problems start early. A recent review of the research on the nutritional status of preschool children revealed some disturbing trends: increasing rates of overweight and obesity, iron deficiency a problem among low-income children, and hunger and poverty continue to have significant negative effects on the nutritional status of very young children.

Parents can rely on providers participating in the CACFP to be good partners in helping their children develop good nutrition habits early. Many children are in care over eight hours each day and eat the majority of their meals at child care. Since many habits learned in child care will last a lifetime, we need to assure that CACFP is available to develop sound nutritional habits in our children. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's **Evaluation of the Child and Adult Care Food Program** found that:

*Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program received meals that were nutritionally superior to those served to children in child care settings without the Child and Adult Care Food Program.*

Family child care providers appreciate the nutrition education and training they receive through the food program in-home visits, group classes, and on-going assistance and support. Child care providers learn not just the importance of good nutrition but practical advice and guidance on serving tasty and nutritious meals and snacks. As a provider explained:

*"The food program offers training in nutrition and helpful food preparation tips that we can pass on to the parents. The program also offers fun and nutritious recipes."*

**Parents and Children benefit because CACFP helps support affordable quality family child care.**

CACFP resources support quality child care that parents can afford. Research has shown that participation in CACFP is one of the indicators of quality child care. The U.S. General Accounting Office's report, **Promoting Quality in Family Child Care**, cited the effectiveness of the program:

*"Because of its unique combination of resources, training, and oversight, experts believe the food program is one of the most effective vehicles for reaching family child care providers and enhancing the care they provide."*

CACFP can be a key source of financial support by providing up to \$3,500 a year for a family child care home serving 5 children. The importance of food program resources can be seen clearly in a quote from this family child care provider:

*" Without the food program child care providers would have to raise their rates. The types and nutritional value of the foods we serve would more than likely decline. The number of meals and snacks served would be less."*

Given the well documented success of Child and Adult Care Food Program we should make the improvement necessary to assure that all eligible children have access to these much needed benefits. (For a summary of research on CACFP please see attachment A.)

### **Increasing Program Access Reaching More Children Feeding More Children It Is Time to STOP THE DROP!**

As part of the 1996 Welfare Reform Law, a complicated means test was implemented into the family child care portion of CACFP. Prior to this means test all family child care homes participated through an effective one rate system. The new means test created a two-tiered system of reimbursements cutting in half the reimbursement rates for families with incomes over 185% of the poverty level.

Before the implementation of the means test the family child care portion of CACFP was one of the fastest growing federal food programs. Since the implementation of the means test, the number of family child care homes, children and meals and snacks served in family child care homes through CACFP has been declining steadily.

We need to turn this trend around and start reaching all eligible children in child care. Research has shown CACFP's key role in helping to assure quality affordable child care. This is especially important to help meet the increased need for quality affordable care to support the efforts of families moving from welfare to work.

Since the implementation of the means test, there has been a 14% drop in the number of family child care homes participating in CACFP, and a 7% drop in the number of children<sup>1</sup> and meals and snack served through CACFP in family child care homes. In fact, in comparison to USDA growth projections, CACFP in family child care now serves a quarter of a billion less meals and snacks than was expected without the means test. (Please see the attachment B for a graph of estimated versus actual participation.)

Let's help working families work by clearing away some of the unnecessary paperwork, making the necessary adjustments to the system and providing support for reaching out to bring CACFP to more child care providers and children. The following recommendations are based on surveys of sponsoring organizations and providers, focus groups and an extensive analysis of participation data.

### **Preserving Effective Nutrition Education and Quality Care**

We need to assure CACFP sponsors (Sponsors are non-profit organizations that administer CACFP to family child care home providers.) have the resources needed to focus on important nutrition education and support services that have been pushed aside by an avalanche of means test paperwork by:

- ★ Increasing sponsoring organizations' per home administrative reimbursement rates to reflect the increased administrative burden of the means test.
- ★ Adjusting the sliding scale for sponsors per home administrative reimbursement upwards to account for the higher fixed costs related to the means test.

- ★ Providing a grant program for using CACFP to improve children's nutrition and child care quality. Initiatives would include:

Enhancing CACFP nutrition education, including obesity prevention focusing on projects that encourage healthy eating habits and physical activity,

Producing models and materials addressing language and cultural issues for serving special populations including immigrant communities, and

Making innovative use of technology to improve program access and nutrition education for providers and children.

### **Program Access**

The final rates adopted for Tier 2 were considerably lower than those initially proposed and the new means test system, with these reduced rates, has had the unintended consequence of driving providers off the program. We need to adjust the system by:

- ★ Raising the Tier 2 reimbursement rates to assure that they are at least minimally adequate to make it worthwhile for providers serving homes with a mix of children from low-income and middle-income families and homes serving middle-income children to participate in CACFP.
- ★ Allowing CACFP family child care providers to facilitate the return of participating children's family income form. (No cost)

### **Reaching More Rural Areas**

Reaching family child care providers in rural areas is especially challenging because of the barriers to using area eligibility, the most successful and inclusive CACFP eligibility mechanism. The distribution of poverty in rural communities makes meeting the 50% area eligibility cut-off more difficult than in highly concentrated urban areas. In addition, serving rural areas requires more resources for time and travel because of the distances involved.

We should adapt the area eligibility criteria to reflect the realities of rural poverty and provide the resources needed to fully serve rural areas by:

- ★ Reducing the area eligibility threshold in family child care from 50 percent to 40 percent.
- ★ Enhancing sponsoring organization reimbursement rates for serving family child care homes in rural areas.

### **Serving More Low-Income Areas**

Serving low-income areas requires additional time and resources to meet increased security needs including at times two-person monitoring teams (for high-crime urban areas), and to help low-income families and providers overcome language and literacy barriers to participate in CACFP.

We should provide the resources required to support the intensive services needed in low-income areas by:

- ★ Enhancing sponsoring organization reimbursement rates for serving family child care homes in low-income areas.

### **Reaching More Low-Income Families by Cutting Red Tape**

We need to improve CACFP's ability to reach low-income families by streamlining program and paperwork requirements through:

- ★ Reducing the area eligibility threshold in family child care from 50 percent to 40 percent.
- ★ Reducing paperwork by extending CACFP categorical eligibility to other beneficiaries of means-tested federally funded programs supporting working families, including Medicaid/SCHIP and child care subsidy programs.
- ★ Standardizing the categorical eligibility requirements for parents and providers.

### **Increasing Access through Paperwork Reduction**

Paperwork is a significant barrier to participation in CACFP. Providers need reasonable CACFP record keeping requirements that allow accountability without being overwhelming. This should be addressed through:

- ★ Making the disregard the same as the National School Lunch Program. (No cost)
- ★ Allow CACFP family child care providers to facilitate the return of participating children's family income form. (No cost)
- ★ Allow carryover funds. (No cost)
- ★ Creating a paperwork reduction task force to examine the feasibility of reducing paperwork related to financial guidance, regulations and record keeping requirements. (No cost)

- ★ Allowing several pilot projects to focus on increased flexibility in record keeping and monitoring requirements to allow targeting of efforts to make the best use of CACFP resources. (No cost)

### **Building On Success of USDA's Management Improvement Initiative**

We need to build on the successes to date of USDA's Management Improvement Initiative in strengthening and supporting CACFP by:

- ★ Making the Initiative permanent, increasing funding, and including a focus on making program management more efficient and reducing barriers to participation. This focus would include:

Streamlining program and paperwork requirements including record keeping,

Developing models for maximizing the use of technology for program operation, nutrition education and training,

Creating partnerships with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education to strengthen quality child care and early education efforts using CACFP, and

Focusing on improving program recruitment and retention.

- ★ Allowing the Secretary of Agriculture to reallocate unspent State agency audit funds.

The need for affordable quality child care is growing, and the need for good nutritious meals and healthy eating habits has never been greater; Congress needs to make the necessary improvements so that the number of children participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program can once again grow to meet these needs.

In conclusion, I would to thank the Committee for their attention to this important program. The National CACFP Forum looks forward to working with the Committee to make the improvement necessary to increase access to CACFP through the 2003 Child Nutrition Reauthorization. (My contact information is attached.)

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i. ADA adjusted for Minnesota change in reporting system.

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ATTACHMENT C

Rod Hofstedt  
President Elect  
Nation CACFP Forum  
c/o ACA  
2885 Country Drive  
Suite 165  
Saint Paul, MN 55117  
651-481-9320  
[rod.hofstedt@acainc.org](mailto:rod.hofstedt@acainc.org)